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# Conversational Hints for Young Shooters

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# CONVERSATIONAL HINTS FOR YOUNG SHOOTERS

*A GUIDE TO POLITE TALK  
IN FIELD, COVERT, AND COUNTRY HOUSE*

BY

R. C. LEHMANN

AUTHOR OF 'HARRY FLUDYER AT CAMBRIDGE' ETC.



London  
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R. C. L.



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# CONVERSATIONAL HINTS FOR YOUNG SHOOTERS

## CHAPTER I

### OF GUNS, CHOKES, BORES, ETC.

MANY manuals have been published for the edification of beginners in the art of shooting. If that art can indeed be acquired by reading, there is no reason why any youth, whose education has been properly attended to, should not be perfectly proficient in it without having fired a single shot. But I have noticed in all these volumes a grave defect. In none of them is any instruction given which shall enable a man to obtain a conversational as well as a merely shooting success. Every pursuit has its proper conversational complement. The farmer must know how to speak of crops and the weather in picturesque and inflammatory language;

the barrister must note, for use at the dinner-table, the subtle jests of his colleagues, the perplexity of stumbling witnesses, and the soul-stirring jokes of judges; the clergyman must babble of Sunday schools and choir practices. Similarly, a shooter must be able to speak of his sport and its varied incidents. To be merely a good shot is nothing. Many dull men can be that. The great thing, surely, is to be both a good shot and a cheerful, light-hearted companion, with a fund of anecdotes and a rich store of allusions appropriate to every phase of shooting. I venture to hope that the hints I have here put together may be of value to all who propose to go out and 'kill something' with a gun.

#### THE GUN

No subject offers a greater variety of conversation than this. But, of course, the occasion counts for a good deal. It would be foolish to discharge it (metaphorically speaking) at the head of the first comer. You must watch for your opportunity. For instance, guns ought not to be talked about directly after breakfast, before a shot has been fired. Better wait till after the shooting-lunch, when a fresh start is being made, say for the high

covert half a mile away. You can then begin after this fashion to your host :—‘ That’s a nice gun of yours, Chalmers. I saw you doing rare work with it at the corner of the new plantation this morning.’ Chalmers is sure to be pleased. You not only call attention to his skill, but you praise his gun, and a man’s gun is, as a rule, as sacred to him as his pipe, his political prejudices, his taste in wine, or his wife’s jewels. Therefore, Chalmers is pleased. He smiles in a deprecating way, and says, ‘ Yes, it’s not a bad gun, one of a pair I bought last year.’

‘ Would you mind letting me feel it ? ’

‘ Not a bit, my dear fellow—here you are.’

You then interchange guns, having, of course, assured one another that they are not loaded. Having received Chalmers’s gun, you first appear to weigh it critically. Then, with an air of great resolution, you bring it to your shoulder two or three times in rapid succession, and fire imaginary shots at a cloud, or a tuft of grass. You now hand it back to Chalmers, observing, ‘ By Jove, old chap, it’s beautifully balanced ! It comes up splendidly. Suits me better than my own.’ Chalmers, who will have been going through a similar pantomime with your gun, will make some decently compli-

mentary remark about it, and each of you will think the other a devilish knowing and agreeable fellow.

From this point you can diverge into a discussion of the latest improvements, as, *e.g.*, 'Are ejectors really valuable?' This is sure to bring out the man who has tried ejectors, and has given them up, because last year, at one of the hottest corners he ever knew, when the sky was simply black with pheasants, the ejectors of both his guns got stuck. He will talk of this incident as another man might talk of the loss of a friend or a fortune. Here you may say—'By gad, what frightful luck! What did you do?' He will then narrate his comminatory interview with his gun-maker; others will burst in, and defend ejectors, or praise their own gun-makers, and the ball, once set rolling, will not be stopped until you take your places for the first beat of the afternoon, just as Markham is telling you that his old governor never shoots with anything but an old muzzle-loader by Manton, and makes deuced good practice with it too.

'Choke' is not a very good topic; it doesn't last long. After you have asked your neighbour if his gun is choked, and told him that your left barrel

has a modified choke, the subject is pretty well exhausted.

‘Cast-off.’ Not to be recommended. There is very little to be made of it.

Something may be done with the price of guns. There’s sure to be someone who has done all his best and straightest shooting with a gun that cost him only 15*l.* Everybody else will say, ‘It’s perfect rot giving such high prices for guns. You only pay for the name. Mere robbery.’ But there is hardly one of them who would consent not to be robbed.

It sometimes creates a pretty effect to call your gun ‘My old fire-iron,’ or ‘my bundook,’ or ‘this old gas-pipe of mine.’

‘Bore.’ Never pun on this word. It is never done in really good sporting society. But you can make a few remarks, here and there, about the comparative merits of twelve-bore and sixteen-bore. Choose a good opening for telling your story of the man who shot with a fourteen-bore gun, ran short of cartridges on a big day, and was, of course, unable to borrow from anyone else. Hence you can deduce the superiority of twelve-bores, as being the more common size.

All these subjects, like all others connected with

shooting, can be resumed and continued after dinner, and in the smoking-room. Talk of the staleness of smoke! It's nothing to the staleness of the stories to which four self-respecting smoking-room walls have to listen in the course of an evening.

## CHAPTER II

### OF CARTRIDGES, POWDER AND SHOT

I HAVE thus indicated very briefly the conversational possibilities of the gun. It must be observed that this treatise makes no pretensions to be exhaustive. Something must, after all, be left to the ingenuity of the young shooter who desires to talk of sport. All that these hints profess, is to put him in the way of shining, if there is a certain amount of natural brightness to begin upon. The next subject will be—

#### CARTRIDGES

To a real talker, this subject offers an infinite variety of opportunities. First, you can begin to fight the battle of the powders, as thus :—

‘ What powder are you shooting with this year, Chalmers ? ’

‘ Schultze.’

‘ How do you find it kill ? ’

‘Deadly—absolutely deadly : best lot I’ve ever had.’

You need not say anything more now. The discussion will get along beautifully without you, for you will have drawn (1), the man who very much prefers E.C., which he warrants to kill at a distance no other powder can attain to ; (2), the man who uses E.C. or Schultze for his right barrel, and always puts a black-powder cartridge into his left ; (3), the detester of innovations, who means to go on using the good old black-powder for both barrels as long as he lives ; and (4), the man who is trying an entirely new patent powder, infinitely superior to anything else ever invented, and is willing to give everybody not only the address of the maker, but half a dozen cartridges to try.

You cannot make much of ‘charges’ of powder. Good shots are dogmatic on the point, and ordinary shots don’t bother their heads about it, trusting entirely to the man who sells them their cartridges. Still you might throw out, here and there, a few words about ‘drams’ and ‘grains.’ Only, above all things, be careful *not* to mention drams in connection with anything but black-powder, nor grains, except with reference to Schultze or E.C. A

laboriously-acquired reputation as a scientific shot has been known to be ruined by a want of clearness on this important point.

‘Shot.’ Conversationally much more valuable than powder. ‘Very few people agree,’ says a well-known authority, ‘as to what is the best size of shot to use, and many forget that the charge which will suit one gun, and one description of game, will not do as well for another. Usually, one gun will shoot better one size of shot than will another, and we may safely say, that large bores shoot large shot better than do smaller bores.’ This last sentence has the beautiful ring of a profound truism. Lay it by for use, and bring it out with emphasis in the midst of such disagreement and forgetfulness as are here alluded to. ‘If a shooter is a good shot,’ says the same classic, ‘he may use No. 6 early in the season, and only for partridges—afterwards, nothing but No. 5. To the average shot, No. 6 throughout the season.’ This sounds dreadfully invidious. If a good shot cannot kill grouse with No. 6, how on earth is a merely average shot to do the trick? But, in these matters, the conversationalist finds his opportunity. Only they must not be pushed too far. There was once a

party of genial, light-hearted friends who went out shooting. Early in the day, slight differences of opinion made themselves observed with reference to the size of shot. Lunch found them still more or less good-tempered, but each obstinately determined not to give way even by a fraction on the point under discussion.

Afterwards they began again. The very dogs grew ashamed of the noise, and went home. That afternoon there was peace in the world of birds—at least, on that particular shooting—and the next morning saw the shooting-parties of England reduced by one, which had separated in different dog-carts, and various stages of high dudgeon, for the railway station. So, please to be very, very careful. Use the methods of compromise. If you find your friend obstinately pinned to No. 5, when you have declared a preference for No. 6, meet him half-way, or even profess to be converted by his arguments. Or tell him the anecdote about the Irishman, who always shot snipe with No. 4, because, ‘being such a little bird, bedad, you want a bigger shot to get at the beggar.’ You can then inform him how you yourself once did dreadful execution among driven grouse in a gale of wind with No. 8 shot, which you

had brought out by mistake. You may object that you never, as a matter of fact, did this execution, never having even shot at all with No. 8. Tush! you are puling. If you are going to let a conscientious accuracy stand in your way like this, you had better become dumb when sporting talk is flying about. Of course you must not exaggerate too much. Only bumptious fools do that, and they are called liars for their pains. But a *little* exaggeration, just a *soupçon* of romance, does no one any harm, while it relieves the prosaic dulness of the ordinary anecdote. So, swallow your scruples, and

Join the gay throng  
That goes talking along,  
For we'll all go romancing to-day.

## CHAPTER III

## SHOOTING-LUNCHES

AND, next, my gallant young Sportsmen, just sharpen up your attention, and, if you have ears, prepare to lend them now. Be, in fact, all ears. At any rate, get yourselves as near as possible to that desirable condition, for we are going to discuss shooting-lunches, and all that pertains to them. Think of it! Are not some of your happiest memories, and your most delightful anticipations, bound up with the mid-day meal, at which the anxieties and disappointments of the morning, the birds you missed, the birds that, though they got up in front of you, were shot by your jealous neighbour, the wiped eyes, the hands torn in the thorn-bushes, at which, as I say, all these are forgotten when you lay aside your gun and sit down to your short repose. Then it is that the talker shines supreme. All the conversation which may have

been broken in upon during the morning by the necessity for posting yourself at the hot corner, or the grassy ride, or in the butt, or for polishing off a right and left of partridges, can then flow free and uninterrupted. Ah, happy moments, when the bad shot becomes as the good, and all distinctions are levelled ! How well, how gratefully, do I remember you ! Still, in my waking fancies, there rises to my nose a savoury odour, telling of stew or hot-pot, and still the crisp succulence of the jam tartlet has honour in my memory. Ah, *tempi passati, tempi passati* ! But away, fancy, and to our work, which is to speak of

#### SHOOTING-LUNCHES

in their relation to talk :—

(1.) Be extremely careful, unless you know exactly the ways of your host with regard to his shooting-lunch, not to express to him before lunch any very definite opinion as to what the best kind of lunch is. If, for instance, you rashly declare that, for your own part, you detest a solemn sit-down-in-a-farmhouse lunch, and that your ideal is a sandwich, a biscuit, and a nip out of a flask, and if you then find yourself lunching off three courses

at a comfortable table, why you'll be in a bit of a hole. Consistency would prompt you to abstain, appetite urges you to eat. What is a poor talker to do? Obviously, he must get out somehow. Here is a suggested method. Begin by admiring the room.

'By Jove, what a jolly little room this is. It's as spick and span as a model dairy. I wish you'd take me on as your tenant, Chalmers, when you've got a vacancy.'

Chalmers will say, 'It's not a bad little hole. Old Mrs. Nubbles keeps things wonderfully spruce. This is one of the cottages I built five years ago.'

There's your first move. Your next is as follows. Every rustic cottage contains gruesome china ornaments and excruciating cheap German prints of such subjects as *The Tryst* (always spelt *The Trist* on the German print), *The Saylor's Return*, *The Warior's Dreem*, *Napoleon at Arcola*, and so forth. Point to a china ornament and say, 'I never knew cows in this part of the country were blue and green.' Then after you've exhausted the cow, milked her dry, so to speak, you can take a turn at the engravings, and make a sly hit at the taste in art generated by modern education. Here-

upon, someone is dead certain to chime in with the veteran grumble about farmers who educate their children above their station by allowing their daughters to learn to play the piano, and their sons to acquire the rudiments of Latin : ' Give you my word of honour, the farmers' daughters about my uncle's place get their dresses made by my aunt's dressmaker, and thump out old Wagner all day long.' This horrible picture of rural depravity will cause an animated discussion. When it is over you can say, ' This is the very best Irish stew I've ever tasted. I must get your cook to give me the receipt.'

' Ah, my boy,' says Chalmers, ' you'll find there's nothing like a stew out shooting.'

' Of course,' you say, ' nothing can beat it, if you've got a nice room to eat it in, and aren't pressed for time ; but, if you've got no end of ground to cover, and not much time to do it in, I can always manage to do myself on a scrap of anything handy. Thanks, I don't mind if I do have a chunk of cake and a whitewash of sherry.'

Thus you have fetched a compass—I fancy the phrase is correct—and have wiped out the memory of your indiscretion. Of course the thing may

happen the other way round. You may have expressed a preference for solid lunches, only to find yourself set down on a tuft of grass, with a beef sandwich and a digestive biscuit. In that case you can begin by declaring your delight in an open-air meal, go on to admire the scenery, and end by expressing a certain amount of judicious contempt for the Sybarite who cannot tear himself away from effeminate luxuries.

But this subject is so great, and has so many varieties, that we must recur to it in our next.

## CHAPTER IV

## THE WOODCOCK SAGA

How well I remember a certain day in the by-gone years, when for the first time a great truth suddenly burst upon me in all its glory. The morning's sport had been unsuccessful. We were all fairly tired, and some of us, in spite of the moderate temperature, were perspiring freely. For we had been walking up late partridges most of the morning, with just an occasional shot here and there at pheasants in covert. Now, late partridges are perhaps the least amenable of created things. They cherish a perfectly ridiculous conviction that nature, in endowing them with life, intended that they should preserve it, and consequently they hold it to be their one aim and object to fly, whirring and cheeping, out of sight, long before even an enthusiastic shot could have a chance of proving to them how beautifully a bird can be missed. For

some reason or other our host had refused, or had been unable, to drive the birds. One result was that we had tramped and tramped and tramped, getting only rare shots, and doing but little execution. Another result was, that the place was simply littered with lost tempers, and we sat down to lunch very much out of conceit with ourselves, our guns, our cartridges, the keepers, the dogs, and everything else. The pleasant array of plates and glasses, and the savoury odours of the meats mitigated but did not dispel the frowns. Then suddenly there dropped down amongst us, as it were from the sky, the Great Woodcock Saga. In a moment the events of the morning were forgotten, brows cleared, tempers were picked up, and an eager hilarity reigned over the company, while the adventures of the wonderful bird were pursued from tree to tree, from clump to clump, through all the zigzags of his marvellous flight, until he finally vanished triumphantly into the unknown.

Now the Great Woodcock Saga is brought about in this way:—First of all, suppose that a woodcock has shown himself somewhere or other during the morning. If he was seen, it follows, as the day follows the night, (1) that *everybody* shot at him

at the most fantastic distances, without regard to the lives and limbs of the rest of the party ; (2) that (in most cases) everybody missed him ; (3) that everybody, though having, according to his own version, been especially careful himself, has been placed in imminent peril by the recklessness of the rest ; (4) that everybody threw himself flat on his face to avoid death ; and (5), that the woodcock is not really a bird at all, but a devil. The following is suggested as an example of Woodcock dialogue, the scene being laid at lunch :—

*First Sportsman (pausing in his attack on a plateful of curried rabbit).—By Jupiter! that was a smartish woodcock. I never saw the beggar till he all but flew into my face, and then away he went like a streak of greased lightning. I let him have both barrels ; but I might as well have shot at a gnat. Still, I fancy I tickled him up with my left.*

*Second Sportsman (a stout, jovial man, breaking in).—Tickled him up! By gum, I thought I was going to be tickled up, I tell you. Shot was flying all round me—bang! bang! all over the place. I loosed off twice at him, and then went down, to avoid punishment. Haven't a notion what became of him.*

*Third Sportsman (choking with laughter at the recollection).*—I saw you go down, old cock. First go off, I thought you were hit; but, when you got that old face of yours up, and began to holler 'Wor guns!' as if you meant to burst, why I jolly soon knew there wasn't much the matter with *you*. Just look at him, you chaps. Do you think an ordinary charge of shot would go through *that*? Not likely.

*Fourth Sportsman (military man).*—Gad, it was awful! I'd rather be bucketed about by Evelyn Wood for a week than face another woodcock. I heard 'em shoutin', 'Woodcock forward! Woodcock back! Woodcock to the right! Woodcock to the left! Mark—mark!' Gad! thinks I to myself, the bally place must be full of 'em. Just then out he came, as sly as be blowed. My old bundook went off of its own accord. I bagged the best part of an oak tree, and, after that, I scooted. Things were gettin' just a shade too warm, by gad! A reg'lar hail-storm, that's what it was. No, thank you, thinks I; not for this party—I'm off to cover. So that's all *I* know about it. Thanks, Tommy—do you mind handin' round that beer-jug?

*First Sportsman (rallying him).*—Just think of

that. And we're all of us taxed to keep a chap like that in comfort. Why, you're *paid* to be shot at—that's what you're *there* for, you and your thin red line, and all that. By Jupiter! we don't get our money's worth out of you if you're going to cut and run before a poor, weak, harmless woodcock.

[*Military Sportsman is heavily chaffed.*]

*Military Sportsman*.—Oh, it's all very well for you Johnnies to gas like that—but, by gad, you didn't seem over-anxious to stand fire yourselves. Why, your teeth are chattering still, Binks.

*Binks*.—Ah, but I'm only a poor civilian.

*Military Sportsman*.—Well, I cut and ran as a civilian. See? Did anyone shoot the bloomin' bird, after all?

*The Host*.—Shoot him? I should think not. The last I saw of him he was sailing off quite comfortable, cocking snooks at the whole lot. Have another go of pie, Johnny?

So that is the Great Woodcock Saga, the absolute accuracy of which every sportsman is bound to recognise. And the great truth that burst upon me is this, that if you want to restore good temper to a shattered party, you must start talking about woodcocks. If you saw a woodcock

in the morning, talk about that one. If not, begin about the woodcock you saw last week, or the woodcock somebody else missed the week before. But whatever you do, always keep a woodcock for a (metaphorically) rainy day. Bring him out at lunch next time you shoot, and watch the effect.

## CHAPTER V

## TYPICAL SHOOTERS

PERHAPS the best piece of advice that I can give you, my young friend, is that—for conversational purposes—you should make a careful study of the natures and temperaments of your companions. Watch their little peculiarities, both of manner and of shooting ; pick up what you can about their careers in sport and in the general world, and use the knowledge so acquired with tact and discretion when you are talking to them. For instance, if one of the party is a celebrated shot, who has done some astonishing record at driven grouse, you may, after the necessary preliminaries, ask him to be good enough to tell you what was the precise number of birds he shot on that occasion. Tell him, if you like, that the question arose the other day during a discussion on the three finest game-shots of the world. If you happen to know that

he shot eighteen hundred birds, you can say that most people fixed the figure at fifteen hundred. He will then say,—‘Ah, I know most people seem to have got that notion—I don’t know why. As a matter of fact, I managed to get eighteen hundred and two, and they picked up twenty-two on the following morning.’ Your obvious remark is, ‘By Jove !’ (with a strong emphasis on the ‘by’) ‘what magnificent shooting !’ After that, the thing runs along of its own accord. With a bad shot your method is, of course, quite different. For example :—

*Young Shot.*—I must say I like the old style of walking up your birds better than driving, especially in a country like this. I never saw such difficult birds as we had this morning. You seemed to have the worst of the luck everywhere.

*Bad Shot.*—Yes—they didn’t come my way much. But I don’t get much practice at this kind of thing—and a man’s no good without practice.

*Y. S.*—That was a deuced long shot, all the same, that you polished off, in the last drive. When I saw him coming at about a hundred miles an hour, I thanked my stars he wasn’t my bird. What a thump he fell !

B. S.—Oh, he was a fairly easy shot, though a bit far off. I daresay I should do well enough if I only got more shooting. I'm not shooting with my own gun, though. It's one of my brother's, and it's rather short in the stock for me.

That starts you comfortably with the Bad Shot. You soothe his ruffled vanity, and give him a better appetite for lunch.

Now, besides the Good Shot and the Bad Shot—the two extremes, as it were, of the line of shooters—you might subdivide your sportsmen further into—

(1.) *The Jovial Shot*.—This party is on excellent terms with himself and with everybody else. Generally he shoots fairly well, but there is a rollicking air about him which disarms criticism, even when he shoots badly. He knows everybody, and talks of most people by nick-names. His sporting anecdotes may be counted upon for, at any rate, a *succès d'estime*. 'I never laughed so much in my life,' he begins, 'as I did last Tuesday. There were four of us—Old Sandy, Butcher Bill, Dick Whortlebury, and myself. Sandy was driving us back from Dillwater Hall—you know, old Puffington's place—where we'd been dining.

Devilish dark night it was, and Sandy's as blind as a bat. When we got to the Devil's Punchbowl I knew there'd be some warm games, 'cos the horse started off full tilt, and, before you could say knife, over we went. I pitched, head first, into Dick's stomach, and Sandy and Bill went bowling down like a right and left of rabbits. Lord, I laughed till the tears ran down my face. No bones broken, but the old Butcher's face got a shade the worst of it with a thornbush on the slope. Cart smashed into matchwood, of course.'

(2.) *The Dressy Shot*.—Wonderful in the boot, stocking, and gaiter department. Very tasteful, too, in the matter of caps and ties. May be flattered by an inquiry as to where he got his gaiters, and if they are an idea of his own. Sometimes bursts out into a belt covered with silver clasps. Fancy waistcoats a speciality. His smoking-suit, in the evening, is a dream of gorgeous rainbows. Is sometimes a very fair shot. Generally wears gloves, and a fair moustache.

(3.) *The Bored Shot*.—A good sportsman, who says he doesn't care about sport. Often has literary tastes. Has views of his own, and is, consequently, looked upon as a rather dangerous

idealist by honest country gentlemen, who confine their reading to an occasional peep at the 'Times,' and an intimate quoting acquaintance with the novels of Mr. Surtees. Often shocks his companions by telling them he really doesn't care much about killing things, and would just as soon let them off. However, he shows a perfectly proper anger if he misses frequently. Is not unlikely to be an authority on sheep and oxen, and may, perhaps, be accepted as the Conservative Candidate for his county division, dumb but indignant county magnates finding that he expresses their views better than they can do it themselves. Don't talk to him about sport. Try him with books, interesting articles in the magazines, and so forth.

(4.) *The Soldier Shot.*—This kind is generally a captain, dresses well, but not gaudily, and smokes big cigars. There seems to be a general idea that a man who can teach privates to shoot targets must be able to shoot game himself. Yet the Soldier Shot misses birds quite beautifully. He will often have shot big game in India with an accuracy that increases in proportion to the number of miles that separate him from the scene

of his exploits. After all, the ability to 'brown' a herd of elephants does not guarantee rights and lefts at partridges. Apt to declaim tersely and forcibly about the hardships of a military career.

(5.) *The Average Shot.*—Talk to him about average matters, unless you hear he is a celebrity in some other branch of sport. In that case, get details from him of his last Alpine climb, or his latest run to hounds, or ask his views on racing matters. Most average shots go racing, and think they understand all about it.

I say nothing here about the Dangerous Shot, because it is never right to get within talking distance of him. In fact, he ought not to be talked to at all. I am not sure he ought to be allowed to live. Still, his exploits furnish material for many an animated conversation amongst the survivors.

## CHAPTER VI

## LADIES AT LUNCH

How delightful it is to awaken interest in the female breast, to make the heart of lovely woman go pit-pat, as her eyes read the words one's pen has written. Even in drawing-rooms and boudoirs, it seems, bright eyes have marked these attempts to teach a correct conversational manner to those who engage in game-shooting. Here is one letter of the hundreds that poured in upon the humble author of these 'Hints' during their serial appearance in *Mr. Punch's* columns.

'We have all been *so* delighted to read your articles about shooting. I read them to papa after dinner in the drawing-room. Mamma says she doesn't understand such matters; but, of course, things have altered *very much* since her young days, as she is always telling us. Now I want to ask your opinion about an important point. *Do*

you think girls ought to go out and join the men at lunch? We all think it *so* delightful, but Fred, my eldest brother, makes himself *extremely* disagreeable about it—at least he did till last week, when Emily Rayburn, who is my very *dearest* friend, was staying with us. Then he told me we might come for a change, but we were to go home again directly afterwards. Generally he says that women are *a bore* out shooting. *Please* tell us what you really think about it.

‘With much love, yours always,

‘ROSE LARKING.

‘P.S.—I am so glad you write the word “lunch,” and not “luncheon.” I told Fred that—but he went to “Johnson’s Dictionary,” and read out something about “lunch” being only a colloquial form of “luncheon.” Still, I don’t care a little bit. Dr. Johnson lived so long ago, and couldn’t possibly know *everything*—could he?

‘R. L.’

My darling young lady, I reply, your letter has made a deep impression on me. Dr. Johnson did, as you say, live many years ago; so many years ago, in fact, that (as a little friend of mine

once said, with a sigh, on hearing that someone would have been one hundred and fifty years old if he had been alive at the present day) he must be 'a orfle old angel now.' The word 'lunch' is short, crisp, and appetising. The word 'luncheon' is of a certain pomposity, which, though it may suit the mansions of the great, is out of place when applied to the meals of active sportsmen. So we will continue, if you please, to speak of 'lunch.' And now for your question. My charming Rose, this little treatise does not profess to do anything more than teach young sportsmen how to converse. I assume that they have learnt shooting from other instructors. And as to the details of shooting-parties, how they should be composed, what they should do or avoid, and how they should bear themselves generally—the subject is too great, too solemn, too noble to be entered upon with a light heart. At any rate, that is not my purpose here. It was rude—*very* rude—of Fred to say you were a bore—and I am sure it wasn't true. I can picture you tripping daintily along with your pretty companions to the lunch *rendezvous*. You are dressed in a perfectly fitting, tailor-made dress, cut short in the skirt, and dis-

playing the very neatest and smallest pair of ankles that ever were seen. And your dear little nose is just a leetle—not red, no, certainly not red, but just delicately pink on its jolly little tip, having gallantly braved the north wind without a veil. To call *you* a bore is absurd. But men are *such* brutes, and it is as certain as that two and two (even at our public schools) make four, that ladies are—what shall I say?—not so popular as they always ought to be when they come amongst shooters engaged in their sport. Even at lunch they are not *always* welcomed with enthusiasm. This is, perhaps, wrong, for, after all, they can do no harm there.

But, darling Rose, I am sure Fred was perfectly right to send you home again directly the meal was over, though it must have wrung his manly heart to part from Emily Rayburn. Even veteran sportsmen have qualms when a poor bird has been merely wounded, or when a maimed hare shrieks as the dog seizes it. I cannot, as I say, discuss the ethics of the question. The good shot is the merciful shot. But, after all, in killing of every kind, whether by the gun or the butcher's knife, there is an element of cruelty.

And therefore, my pretty Rose, *you* must keep away from the shooting. Besides, have I not seen a good shot 'tailor' half-a-dozen pheasants in succession, merely because a chattering lady—not a dear, pleasant little lump of delight like you, Rose—had posted herself beside him, and made him nervous? By all means come to lunch if you must, but, equally by all means, leave the guns to themselves afterwards. As for ladies who themselves shoot, why the best I can wish them is that they should promptly shoot themselves. I can't abide them. Away with them!

But, in order that the purpose of this work may be fulfilled, and the conversational method inculcated, I here give a short 'Ladies-at-lunch-dialogue,' phonographically recorded, as a party of five guns was approaching the place of lunch, at about 1.30 P.M.

*First Sportsman (addressing his companion).*—Now then, Tommy, my son, just smarten yourself up a bit and look pretty. The ladies are coming to lunch.

*Tommy (horror-struck).*—*What?* The women coming to lunch? No, hang it all, you're joking. Say you are—do!

*First Sp.*—Joking? Not I! I tell you six solid women are going to lunch with us. I heard 'em all talking about it after breakfast, and thinking it would be, *oh*, such fun! By the way, I suppose you know you've got a hole in your knicker-bockers.

*Tommy (looking down, and perceiving a huge and undisguisable rent).*—Good heavens! so I have. I must have done it getting over the last fence. Isn't it awful? I can't show like this. Have you got any pins?

[*The Keeper eventually promises that there shall be pins at the farm-house.*

*Another Sportsman (bringing up the rear with a companion).*—Hope we shan't be long over lunch. There's a lot of ground to cover this afternoon, and old Sykes tells me they've got a splendid head of birds this year. I always think—— (*He breaks off suddenly; an expression of intense alarm comes over his face.*) Why, what's that? No, it can't be! Yes, by Jingo, it is! It's the whole blessed lot of women come out to lunch, my wife and all. Well, poor thing, she couldn't help it. Had to come with the rest, I suppose. But it's mean of Chalmers—I swear it is. He ought not to have allowed

it. And then, never to let on about it to us. Well, my day's spoilt if they come on with us afterwards. I couldn't shoot an ostrich sitting with a woman chattering to me. Miss Chickweed's got her eye on you, Lloyd. She's marked you. No good trying to do a ramp. You're nailed, my boy, nailed !

*Lloyd.*—Hang Miss Chickweed ! She half killed me last night with all kinds of silly questions. Asked me to be sure and bring her home a rocketing rabbit, because she'd heard they were very valuable. Why can't the women stay at home ?

*[They walk on moodily.]*

*A few minutes later. Lunch has just begun.*

*Miss Chickweed (middle-aged, but skittish).*—Oh, you naughty men, how long you have kept us waiting ! Now, Captain Lloyd, did you shoot really well ? Or, were you thinking of — Well, perhaps I oughtn't to say. See how discreet I am. But do tell me, all of you, *exactly* how many birds you shot—I do so like to hear about it. You begin, Captain Lloyd. How many did you shoot ? (*Without waiting for an answer.*) I'm sure you must have shot a dozen. Yes, I guess a dozen. And, oh, do give me a feather for my hat ! It will be so

nice to have a *real* feather to put in it. And we've got such a treat for you. Mary, you tell them. No, I'll tell them myself. If you're all *very* good at lunch, we're going to walk with you a little afterwards. There!

*[But, at this awful prospect, consternation seizes the men. CHALMERS (the host) makes frantic signs to his wife, who (having, somehow, been 'squared') affects not to see. A few desperate attempts are made to express a polite joy; but the lunch languishes, and gloom closes over the melancholy scene.]*

## CHAPTER VII

### OF SMOKING

THE subject of lunch, my dear young friends, has now been exhausted. We have done, for the time, with poetry, and descend again to the ordinary prose of every-day shooting. Yet stay—before we proceed further, there is one matter, apart from the mere details of sport, which may be profitably considered in this treatise. It is the divine, the delightful subject of

#### SMOKING

First, I ask, do you know—(1) the man who never smokes from the night of August 11 up to the night of February 1 in the following year, for fear of injuring his sight and his shooting nerve? (2) the host who forbids all smoking amongst the guests assembled at his house for a shooting-party?

You, naturally enough, reply that you have not the honour of being acquainted with these severe but enthusiastic gentlemen. Nobody does know them. They don't exist. But it is very useful to affect a sort of second-hand knowledge of these Gorgons of the weed, as thus :

*A Party of Guns is walking to the first beat of the day. Time, say about 10.20 A.M.*

*Young Sportsman (who has a pipe in his mouth, to Second Sportsman, similarly adorned).—I always think the after-breakfast smoke is about the best of the day. Somehow, tobacco tastes sweeter than than at any other time of the day.*

*Second Sp. (puffing vigorously).—Yes, it's first-class ; but I hold with smoke at most times of the day, after breakfast, after lunch, after dinner, and in between.*

*Young Sp.—Well, I don't know. If I try to smoke when I'm actually shooting, I generally find I've got my pipe in the gun side of my mouth. I heard of a man the other day who knocked out three of his best teeth through bringing up his gun sharp, and forgetting he'd got a pipe in his mouth. Poor beggar ! he was very plucky about*

it, I believe; but it made no end of a difference to his pronunciation till he got a new lot shoved in. Just like that old Johnnie in the play—Overland something or other—who lost his false set of teeth on a desert island, and couldn't make any of the other Johnnies understand him.

*Second Sp.*—I've never had any difficulty with my smoking. I always make a habit of carrying my smokes in the left side of my mouth.

*Young Sp.*—Oh, but you're pretty certain to get the smoke or the ashes or something blown slap into your eyes just as you're going to loose off. No. (*With decision.*) I'm off my smoke when the popping begins.

*Second Sp.*—Don't be too hard on yourself, my boy. They tell me there are precious few birds in the old planting this year, so you can treat yourself to a cigarette when you get there. It never pays to trample on one's longing for tobacco too much.

*Young Sp.*—No, by Jove. Old Reggie Morris told me of a fellow he met somewhere this year, who goes regularly into training for shooting. Never touches baccy from August to February, and limits his drink to three pints a day, and no

whiskies and sodas. And what's more, he won't let any of his guests smoke when he's got a shoot on. He's got 'No Smoking' posted up in big letters in every room in the house. Reggie said it was awful. He had to lock his bed-room door, shove the chest-of-drawers against it, and smoke with his head stuck right up the chimney. He got a peck of soot, one night, right on the top of his nut. Now, I call that simple rot.

*Second Sp.*—Ah, I've heard of that man. Never met him, though, I'm thankful to say. Let me see, what's the beggar's name? Jackson or Barrett, or Pollard, or something like that. He's got a big place in Suffolk, or Yorkshire, or somewhere about there.

*Young Sp.*—Yes, that's the chap, I fancy.

Now, that kind of thing starts you very nicely for the day. It isn't necessary that either of the sportsmen whose dialogue has been reported should believe implicitly in the absolute truth of what he is saying. Observe, neither of them says that he himself met this man. He merely gets conversation out of him on the strength of what someone else has told him. That, you see, is the real trick

of the thing. Don't bind yourself to such a story as being part of your own personal experience. Work it in on another man's back. Of course there are exceptions even to this rule. But this question I shall be able to treat at greater length when I come to deal with the important subject of 'Shooting Anecdotes.'

Very often you can work up quite a nice little conversation on cigarettes. Every man believes, as is well known, that he possesses the only decent cigarettes in the country. He either—(1) imports them himself from Cairo, or (2) he gets his tobacco straight from a firm of growers somewhere in Syria and makes it into cigarettes himself; or (3) he thinks Egyptian cigarettes are an abomination, and only smokes Russians or Americans; or (4) he knows a man, Backastopoulo by name, somewhere in the Ratcliffe Highway, who has *the* very best cigarettes you ever tasted. You wouldn't give two-pence a hundred for any others after smoking these, he tells you. And, lastly, there is the man who loathes cigarettes, despises those who smoke them, and never smokes anything himself except a special kind of cigar ornamented with a sort of red and gold garter.

Out of this conflict of preferences the young shooter can make capital. By flattering everybody in turn, he can practically get his smoking gratis; for everyone will be sure to offer him at least one cigarette, in order to prove the superiority of his own particular kind. And if the young shooter, after smoking it, expresses a proper amount of ecstasy, he is not at all unlikely to have a second offered to him. Most men are generous with cigarettes.

Here is a final piece of advice. Admire all cigarette-cases, and say of each that it's the very best and prettiest you ever saw. You can have no notion how much innocent pleasure you will give.

## CHAPTER VIII

## THE SMOKING-ROOM

THE subject of the smoking-room would seem to be intimately and necessarily connected with the subject of smoke, which was dealt with in our last chapter. A very good friend of mine, Captain Shabrack of the 55th (Queen Elizabeth's Own) Hussars, was good enough to favour me with his views the other day. I met the gallant officer, who is, as all the world knows, one of the safest and best shots of the day, in Pall Mall. He had just stepped out of his Club—the luxurious and splendid Tatterdemalion, or, as it is familiarly called, 'the Tat'—where, to use his own graphic language, he had been 'killing the worm with a nip of Scotch.'

'Early Scotch woodcock, I suppose,' says I, sportively alluding to the proverb.

‘Scotch woodcock be blowed !’ says the captain, who, it must be confessed, does not include an appreciation of delicate humour amongst his numerous merits; ‘Scotch, real Scotch, a noggin of it, my boy, with soda in a long glass; glug, glug, down it goes, hissin’ over the hot coppers. You know the trick, my son, it’s no use pretendin’ you don’t’—and thereupon the high-spirited warrior dug me good-humouredly in the ribs, and winked at me with an eye which, if the truth must be told, was bloodshot to the very verge of ferocity.

‘Talkin’ of woodcock,’ he continued—we were now walking along Pall Mall together—‘they tell me you’re writin’ some gas or other about shootin’. Well, if you want a tip from me, just you let into the smokin’-room shots a bit; you know the sort I mean, fellows who are reg’lar devils at killin’ birds when they haven’t got a gun in their hands. Why, there’s that little son of a corncrake, Flickers—when once he gets talkin’ in a smokin’-room nothing can hold him. He’d talk the hind leg off a donkey. I know he jolly nearly laid me out, the last time I met him, with all his talk—No, you don’t,’ continued the captain, imagining,

perhaps, that I was going to rally him on his implied connection of himself with the three-legged animal he had mentioned, 'no you don't—it wouldn't be funny; and besides, I'm not donkey enough to stand much of Flickers. So just you pitch into him, and the rest of 'em, my bonny boy, next time you put pen to paper.' At this moment my cheerful friend observed a hansom that took his fancy. 'Gad!' he said, 'I never can resist one of those indiarubber tyres. Ta, ta, old cock—keep your pecker up! Never forget your goloshes when it rains, and always wear flannel next your skin,' and, with that, he sprang into his hansom, ordered the cabman to drive him round the town as long as a florin would last, and was gone.

Had the captain only stayed with me a little longer, I should have thanked him for his hint, which set me thinking. I know Flickers well. Many a time have I heard that notorious romancer holding forth on his achievements in sport, in love, in society. I have caught him tripping, convicted him of imagination on a score of occasions; dozens of his acquaintances must have found him out over and over again; but the fellow

sails on, unconscious of a reverse, with a sort of smiling persistence, down the stream of modified untruthfulness, of which nobody ought to know better than Flickers the rapids, and shallows, and rocks on which the mariner's bark is apt to go to wreck. What is there in the pursuit of sport, I ask myself, that brings on this strange tendency to exaggeration? How few escape it. The excellent, the prosaic Dubson, that broad-shouldered, whiskered, and eminently snub-nosed Nimrod, he, too, gives way occasionally. Flickers's, I own, is an extreme case. He has indulged himself in fibs to such an extent that fibs are now as necessary to him as drams to the drunkard. But Dubson the respectable, Dubson the dull, Dubson the unromantic—why does the gadfly sting him too, and impel him now and then to wonderful antics. For was it not Dubson who told me, only a week ago, that he had shot three partridges stone dead with one shot, and in measuring the distance, had found it to be 100 yards less two inches? Candidly, I do not believe him; but naturally enough, I was not going to be outdone, and I promptly returned on him with my well-known anecdote about the shot which *ricocheted* from a driven bird in front

of me and pierced my host's youngest brother—a plump, short-coated Eton boy, who was for some reason standing with his back to me ten yards in my rear—in a part of his person sacred as a rule *plagoso Orbilio*. The shrieks of the stricken youth, I told Dubson, still sounded horribly in my ears. It took the country doctor an hour to extract the pellets—an operation which the boy endured with great fortitude, merely observing that he hoped his rowing would not be spoiled for good, as he should bar awfully having to turn himself into a dry-bob. This story, with all its harrowing details, did I duly hammer into the open-mouthed Dubson, who merely remarked that 'it was a rum go, but you can never tell where a *ricochet* will go,' and was beginning upon me with a brand new *ricochet* anecdote of his own, when I hurriedly departed.

Wherefore, my gay young shooters, you who suck wisdom and conversational ability from these pages, it is borne in upon me that for your benefit I must treat of the smoking-room in its connection with shooting parties. Thus, perhaps, you may learn not so much what you ought to say, as what you ought not to say, and your discretion shall be the admiration of a

whole country side. ‘The smoking-room: with which is incorporated “Anecdotes.”’ What a rollicking, cheerful, after-dinner sound there is about it. Shabrack might say it was like the title of a cheap weekly, which, as a matter of fact, it does resemble. But what of that?

## CHAPTER IX

## THE SMOKING-ROOM

*(With which is incorporated 'Anecdotes')*

LET us imagine, if you please, that the toils and trampings of the day are over. You are staying at a comfortable country-house with friends whom you like. You have had a good day at your host's pheasants and his rabbits. Your shooting has been fairly accurate, not ostentatiously brilliant, but on the whole satisfactory. You have followed out the hints given in my previous chapters, and are consequently looked upon as a pleasant fellow with plenty to say for himself. After tea, in the drawing-room, you have had an hour or two for the writing of letters, which you have, of course, not written, for the reading of the morning papers from London, which you have skimmed with a faint interest, and for the forty or eighty or one hundred and twenty winks in an arm-chair in front of the

fire, which are by no means the least pleasant and comforting incident in the day's programme. You have dressed for dinner in good time; you have tied your white tie successfully 'in once'; you have taken in a charming girl (Rose Larking, let us say) to dinner. The dinner itself has been good, the drawing-room interlude after dinner has been pleasantly varied with music, and the ladies have, with the tact for which they are sometimes distinguished, retired early to bed-rooms, where it is believed they spend hours in the combing of their beautiful hair, and the interchange of gossip. You are in high spirits. You think, indeed you are sure (and again, on thinking it well over, not quite so sure), that the adorable Rose looked kindly upon you as she said good-night, and allowed her pretty little hand to linger in your own while you assured her that to-morrow you would get for her the pinion-feather of a woodcock, or die in the attempt. You are now arrayed in your smoking-coat (the black with the red silk facings), and your velvet slippers with your initials worked in gold—a birthday present from your sister. All the rest are, each after his own fashion, similarly attired, and the whole male party is gathered

together in the smoking-room. There you sit and smoke and chat until the witching hour of night, when everybody yawns and grave men, as well as gay, go up to their beds.

Now, since you are an unassuming youngster, and anxious to learn, you ask me, probably, how you are to bear yourself in this important assembly, what you are to speak about, and how. The chief thing, I answer, is *not to be a bore*. It is so easy *not to be a bore* if only you give a little thought to it. Nobody wants to be a bore. I cannot imagine any man consciously incurring the execration of his fellow-men. And yet there exist innumerable bores scattered through the length and breadth of our happy country, and carrying on their dismal business with an almost malignant persistency. Longwindedness, pomposity, the exaggeration of petty trivialities, the irresistible desire to magnify one's own wretched little achievements, to pose as the little hero of insignificant adventures, and to relate them to the whole world in every dull detail, regardless of the right of other men to get an occasional word in edgewise—these are the true marks of the genuine bore. He must know that you take no interest in him or his story.

Even if you did, his manner of telling it would flatten you yet he fascinates you with that glassy stare, that self-conscious and self-admiring smirk, and distils his tale into your ears at the very moment when you are burning to talk over old college-days with Chalmers, or to discuss an article in the 'Field' with Shabrack.

I remember once finding myself, by some freak of mocking destiny, in a house in which *two* bores had established fortified camps. On the first night, we all became so dazed with intolerable dulness that our powers of resistance faded away to the vanishing point. Both bores sallied out from their ramparts, laid our little possessions waste, and led each his tale of captives back with him, gagged, bound, and incapable of struggle.

So next day, when the accustomed train  
Of things grew round our sense again,

we agreed together—those of us, I mean, who had suffered on the previous night—that something must be done. What it was to be we could not at first decide. We should have preferred 'something lingering, with boiling oil in it,' but at last we decided on the brilliant suggestion of Shabrack,

who was of the party, that we should endeavour, by some means or other, to bring the two bores, as it were, face to face in a kind of boring-competition in the smoking-room that very night, to engage them in warfare against one another, and ourselves to sit by and watch them mutually extinguishing one another—a result that, we were certain, could not fail to be brought about, owing to the deadly nature of the weapons with which each was provided. Both the bores, I may observe, shot execrably during the day. In the evening, after a short preliminary skirmish, from which Shabrack, the Hussar, extricated us with but little loss, that which we desired came to pass. It was a terrible spectacle. In a moment both these magnificent animals, their bristles erect and their tusks flashing fiercely in the lamp-light, were locked in the death-grapple. Every detail of the memorable struggle is indelibly burnt into my brain. Even at this distance of time, I can remember how we all looked on, silent, awestruck, fascinated, as the dreadful fight proceeded to its inevitable close. For the benefit of others, let me attempt to describe it in the appropriate language of the ring.

GREAT FIGHT BETWEEN THE KENTISH PROSER AND  
THE HAMPSHIRE DULLARD

*Round I.*—Both men advanced, confident but cautious. After sparring for an opening, the Proser landed lightly on the jaw with,—‘When the Duke of Dashbury did me the honour to ask me to his grace’s noble deer-forest.’ He ducked to avoid the return, but the Hampshire champion would not be denied, and placed two heavy fish-stories fair in the bread-basket. The Proser swung round a vicious right-hander anecdote about a stag shot at 250 yards, but the blow fell short, and he was fairly staggered by two in succession (‘the tree-climbing rabbit,’ and ‘the Marquis of Fullfield’s gaiters’), delivered straight on the mouth. First blood for the Dullard. After some hard exchanges they closed and fell, the Dullard underneath.

*Round II.*—Both blowing a good deal. The Proser put up his dukes, and let fly with both of them, one after another, at the Dullard’s conk, drawing claret profusely. Nothing daunted, the Dullard watched his opportunity, and delivered a first-class royal prince on the Proser’s right eye,

half closing that optic. The men now closed, but broke away again almost directly. Some smart fibbing, in which neither could claim an advantage, ensued. The round was brought to a close by some rapid exchanges, after which the Proser went down. Betting 6 to 4 on the Dullard.

*Round III., and last.*—Proser's right peeper badly swollen, the Dullard gory, and a bit groggy, but still smiling. Proser opened with a *ricochet*, which did great execution, but was countered heavily when he attempted to repeat the trick, the Dullard all but knocking him off his legs with a fifty-pound salmon. After some slight exchanges they began a hammer-and-tongs game, in which Proser scored heavily. Dullard, however, pulled himself together for a final rush. They met in the middle of the ring, and both fell heavily. As neither was able to rise, the fight was drawn. Both men were heavily damaged, and were carried away with their jaws broken.

There you have the story. The actual result was that these two ponderous bores all but did one another to death. So exhausted were they by the terrible conflict that our comfort was not again

disturbed by them during this particular visit. We were lucky, though at first we scarcely saw it, in getting two evenly-matched ironclad bores together. If we had had only one, the matter would have been far more difficult.

## CHAPTER X

THE SMOKING-ROOM—(*concluded*)

I MAY assume that, after the terrible example given in my last chapter, you have firmly made up your mind never on any account to take service in the great army of bores. But this determination is not all that is necessary. A man must constantly keep a strict guard on himself, lest he should unconsciously deviate even for a few minutes into the regions of boredom. Whatever you do, let nothing tempt you to relate more than once any grievance you may have. Nothing, of course, is more poisonous to the aggrieved one than to stifle his grievance absolutely. Once, and once only, he may produce it to his friends. I shall be blamed, perhaps, for making even this slight concession. Please be careful, therefore, not to abuse it. Is there in the whole world a more ridiculous sight than a strong, healthy, well-fed sportsman who wearies his companions one after another with the

depressing recital of his ill-luck, or of the dastardly behaviour of the head-keeper in not stopping the whole party for half an hour to search for an imaginary bird, which is supposed to have fallen stone-dead somewhere or other ; or of the iniquities of the man from whom he bought his cartridges in not loading them with the right charge ; or any of the hundred inconveniences and injuries to which sportsmen are liable. All these things may be as he says they are. He may be the most unfortunate, the most unjustly treated of mankind. But why insist upon it ? Why check the current of sympathy by the dam of constant repetition ? And, after all, how trivial and absurd the whole thing is ! Even a man whose career has been ruined by malicious persecution will be avoided like a pest if it is known that he dins the account of his wrongs into everyone's ears. How, then, shall the sufferer by the petty injuries of ordinary sport be listened to with patience ? Of all bores, the grievancemonger is the fiercest and worst. Lay this great truth by in your memory, and be mindful of it in more important matters than sport when the occasion arises.

I have been asked to say whether a man may

abuse his gun ? I reply emphatically, no. A gun is not a mere ordinary machine. Its beautiful arrangement of locks, and springs, and catches, and bolts, and pins, and screws, its unaccountable perversities, its occasional fits of sulkiness, its lovely brown complexion, and its capacity both for kicking and for smoking, all prove that a gun is in reality a sentient being of a very high order of intelligence. You may be quite certain that if you abuse your gun, even when you may imagine it to be far out of earshot, comfortably cleaned and put to roost on its rack, your gun will resent it. Why are most sportsmen so silent, so *distraits* at breakfast ? Why do they dally with a scrap of fish, and linger over the consumption of a small kidney, and drink great draughts of tea to restore their equilibrium ? If you ask them, they will tell you that it's because they're 'just a bit chippy,' owing to sitting up late, or smoking too much, or forgetting to drink a whisky and soda before they went to bed. I know better. It is because they incautiously spoke evil of their guns, and their guns retaliated by haunting their sleep. I know guns have this power of projecting horrible emanations of themselves into the slumbers of sportsmen who

have not treated them as they deserved. I have suffered from it myself. It was only last week that, having said something derogatory to the dignity of my second gun, I woke with a start at two o'clock in the morning, and found its wraith going through the most horrible antics in a patch of moonlight on my bed-room floor. I shot with that gun on the following day, and missed nearly everything I shot at. Could there be a more convincing proof? Take my advice, therefore, and abstain from abusing your gun.

Now, your typical smoking-room conversation ought always to include the following subjects:—  
(1) The wrong-headed, unpopular man, whom every district possesses, and who is always at loggerheads with somebody; (2) 'The best shot in England,' who is to be found in every countryside, and in whose achievements all the sportsmen of his particular district take a patriotic pride; (3) the folly and wickedness of those who talk or write ignorantly against any kind of sport; (4) the deficiency of hares, due to the rascally provisions of the Hares and Rabbits Act; (5) a few reminiscences, slightly glorified, of the particular day's sport; and (6) a prolonged argument on the

relative merits of the old plan of shooting birds over dogs and the modern methods of walking them up or driving. These are not the only, but certainly the chief, ingredients. Let me give you an example, drawn from my note-book.

SCENE—*The Smoking-room of a Country-house in December. Six Sportsmen in Smoking-coats*

Time 11.15 P.M.

*First Sportsman (concluding a harangue).*—All I can say is I never read such rot in all my life. Why, the fellow doesn't know a gun from a cartridge-bag. I'm perfectly sick of reading that everlasting rubbish about 'pampered minions of the aristocracy slaughtering the unresisting pheasant in his thousands at battues.' I wonder what the beggars imagine a rocketing pheasant is like. I should like to have seen one of 'em outside Chivy Wood to-day. I never saw taller birds in my life. Talk of *them* being easy! Why, a pheasant gets ever so much more show for his money when he's beaten over the guns. If they simply walk him up, he hasn't got a thousand to one chance. Bah!

[*Drinks from a long glass.*

*Second Sportsman.*—I saw in some paper the other day what the late President of the United States thought about English battue-shooting. Seemed to think we shot pheasants perched in the trees, and went on to say that wasn't the sport for *him*; *he* liked to go after his game, and find it for himself. Who the deuce cares if *he* does? If *he* can't talk better sense than that, no wonder Cleveland beat *him* in the election.

*Third Sp.*—Pure rubbish, of course. Still I must say, apart from pheasants, I like the old plan of letting your dogs work. It's far more sport than walking up partridges in line, or getting them driven at you.

*First Sp.*—My dear fellow, I don't agree with you a bit. In the first place, as to driving—driven birds are fifty times more difficult; and what's the use of wasting time with setters or pointers in ordinary root-fields. It's all sentiment.

*[A long and animated discussion ensues. This particular subject never fails to provoke a tremendous argument.]*

*(A few minutes later.)*

*Second Sportsman (to the host).*—What was the bag to-day, Chalmers?

*Chalmers.*—A hundred and forty-five pheasants, fifty-six rabbits, eleven hares, three pigeons, and a woodcock. We should have got a hundred and eighty pheasants if they hadn't dodged us in the big wood. I can't make out where they went.

*Second Sportsman.*—It's a deuced difficult wood to beat, that is. I thought we should have got more hares, all the same.

*Chalmers.*—Hares! I think I'm precious lucky to get so many nowadays. There won't be a hare left in a year or two.

(*The discussion proceeds.*)

*Third Sportsman.*—How's old Johnny Raikes shooting this year? I never saw such a chap for rocketers. They can't escape him.

*Chalmers.*—I asked him to-day, but he couldn't come. I think for pheasants he's quite the best shot in England. Nobody can beat him at that game.

*Fourth Sportsman.*—Hasn't he got some row or other on with Crackside?

*Chalmers.*—Yes. That makes fourteen rows Crackside has got going on all at once. He seems to revel in them. His latest move was to refuse to pay tithe, and when the parson levied a distress,

he made all his tenants drunk, and walked at their head blowing a post-horn. He's as mad as a hatter.

So there you have a sample conversation, sketched in outline. You will find it accurate enough. All you have to do is to select for yourself the part you mean to play in it.

## CHAPTER XI

## LADIES AGAIN

BEFORE I proceed with the order of subjects which I have proposed to myself as the proper one to follow, I feel that I must revert for a moment to the question of 'ladies at lunch.' You may remember that a few chapters back I ventured to offer some observations on this topic. Dear ladies, you can read for yourselves the winged words in which I settled the matter. 'By all means,' I said, 'come to lunch, if you must.' What can be plainer or more direct? Bless your pretty, pouting faces, I am not responsible for the characters of my fellow-men, nor for the harsh language they use. If they behave like boors, and show an incomprehensible distaste for your delightful presence, am I, your constant friend, to be blamed? I cannot alter the nature of these barbarians. But what has happened since I published an article which had,

at any rate, the merit of truthful portraiture? Why, I have been overwhelmed with epistolary reproaches in every variety of feminine hand-writing. 'A careful mother' writes from Dorset—a locality hitherto associated in my mind with butter rather than with blame—to protest that she has been so horrified by my cynical tone, that she does not intend to take 'Punch' in any longer. She adds, that "Punch" has laid upon my drawing-room table for more than thirty years.' Heavens, that he should have been so deeply, so ungrammatically, honoured without knowing it! Is he no longer to recline amid photograph albums, gift-books, and flower-vases, upon that sacred table? And are you, madam, to spite a face which has always, I am certain, beamed upon him with a kindly consideration, by depriving it wantonly of its adorning and necessary nose. Heaven forbid! Withdraw for his sake and for yours that rash decision, while there is yet time, and restore him to his wonted place in your affections, and your drawing-room.

But all are not like this. Here, for instance, is a sensible and temperate commentary, which it gives me pleasure to quote word for word as it was written :—

‘Dear Mr. —,—I want to tell you that, although I am what one of your friends called ‘a solid woman,’ and ought to feel *deeply* hurt by what you said about ladies at lunch, yet I liked that article the best. I think it was *awfully* good. But don’t you think you are all rather hard on ladies at shooting-boxes? My idea is that there ought to be some new rules about shooting-parties. At present, ladies are asked to amuse the men—at least that is my experience—and it is rather hard they may not sometimes go on the moors, if they want to. But, at the same time, I *quite* understand that they are horribly in the way, and I am not surprised that the men don’t want women about them when they are shooting. But couldn’t they arrange to have a day now and then, when they could shoot all the morning, and devote themselves to amusing the women on the moors after lunch? Otherwise, I think there ought to be a rule that no women are to be invited to shooting-boxes. It is generally very dull for the women, and I feel sure the men would be quite as happy without them. I suppose the host might want his wife to be there, to look after things; but *she ought to strike*, and ask her lady-friends to do the same; and then they

could go abroad, or to some jolly place, and enjoy themselves in their own way. Really we often get quite angry—at least I do—when men treat us as if we were so many dolls, and patronise us in their heavy way, and expect us to believe that the world was made entirely for them and their shooting-parties. There must be more give and take. And, if *we* are to give you our sympathy and attention, *you* must take our companionship a little oftener. We women get so dull when we are all together.

‘Your sincere admirer,

‘A LADY LUNCHER.’

I confess this simple letter touched an answering chord in my heart. I scarcely knew how to answer it. At last a brilliant thought struck me. I would show it to my tame hussar-captain, Shabrack. That gallant son of Mars is not only a good sportsman, but he has, in common with many of his brother officers, the reputation of being a dashing, but discriminating worshipper at the shrine of beauty. At military and hunt balls the captain is a stalwart performer, a despiser of mere programme engagements, and an invincible cutter-out of timid youths who venture to put forward their claims to

a dance that the captain has mentally reserved for himself. The mystery is how he has escaped scatheless into what his friends now consider to be assured bachelor-hood. Most of his contemporaries, roystering, healthy, and seemingly flinty-hearted fellows, all of them, have long since gone down, one after another, before some soft and smiling little being, and are now trying to fit their incomes to the keep of perambulators, as well as of dog-carts. But Shabrack has escaped. I found him at his club, and showed him the letter, requesting him at the same time to tell me what he thought of it. I think he was flattered by my appeal, for he insisted on my immediate acceptance of a cigar six inches long, and proposed to me a tempting list of varied drinks. The captain read the letter through twice carefully, and thus took up his parable:—

‘Look here, my son, don’t you be put off by what the little woman says. She don’t mean half of it. Get the hostess to strike! ’—here he laughed loudly—‘now that’s a real good ‘un. Why, they haven’t got it in them. Fact is, they can’t stand one another’s company. She says as much, don’t she? “We get so dull when we are all together.” Well, that scarcely looks like goin’ off on the strike

together, does it ? Don't you be alarmed, old quill-driver, they'll never run a strike of that kind for more than a day. They'll all come troopin' back, beggin' to be forgiven, and all that, and, by gum, we shall have to take 'em back too, just as we're all congratulatin' ourselves that we shan't have to go to any more blessed picnics. That's a woman's idea of enjoyin' herself in the country—nothin' but one round of picnics. I give you my word, when I was stayin' with old Fred Derriman, in Perthshire, they reg'larly mapped out the whole place for picnics, and I'm dashed if they didn't spoil our best day's drivin' by picnickin' in, "oh, such a sweet place." Truth is, they can't get along without us, my son, only they won't admit it, bless 'em ! And, after all, we're better off when they're in the house, I'm bound to confess ; so I don't mind lettin' 'em have a picnic or two, just to keep 'em sweet. Them's my sentiments, old cock, and you're welcome to them.'

I thanked the captain for his courtesy, and withdrew. But if the whole thing is merely a matter of picnics, it is far simpler than I imagined.

## CHAPTER XII

## THE SHOOTING DILETTANTE

THIS little manual is, I am glad to know, exciting a certain amount of attention in the shooting world. It was only the other day that I found myself engaged in helping my friend Wingfield to destroy his partridges. It was to be a big drive, and it was assumed that, as usual, the ladies of the party would join the guns at lunch. But when the discussion as to time and place began at breakfast, an unwonted reluctance was to be observed amongst the fair.

‘Tom,’ said the amiable Mrs. Wingfield to her husband, ‘I am not quite sure we shall be able to join you at lunch. Isabella has a headache, and Agnes Watson wants to sketch the Abbey ruins, and Sibyl Carr has a great many letters to write. I think, if you don’t mind, we’ll stay at home to-day.’

At this Tom looked grieved, and I ventured to break out into a protest :

‘ Dear Mrs. Wingfield,’ I implored, ‘ don’t give us up altogether. Do come and re-civilise us at lunch.’

At this Mrs. Wingfield gave me a look, and only whispered ‘ hypocrite.’ I tried to look surprised and indignant.

‘ You, sir,’ she continued, ‘ ought to be the last to protest. Are we not carrying out the disgusting precepts that you have preached to us in your *horrid* paper? And then you dare to try and inveigle us out to lunch. I suppose you want to—what do you call it?—make copy out of us. But we don’t mean to give you the chance.’ And with that she flung out of the room, leaving me abashed. ‘ Never mind the little woman,’ said Tom, ‘ we shall spend less time on lunch, and be able to do more shooting,’ and in this cheerful view we all concurred—all, that is, except Jack Wingfield, Tom’s younger brother, whose attentions to Agnes Watson had been very noticeable. In fact, when Jack heard that we were not to be anywhere in the neighbourhood of the Abbey ruins, his distress was pitiable, and his anger against me as the author of

his disappointment was very violent. But mark the sequel. When we approached the pretty farmhouse in which our lunch was spread, there they all were standing by the gate to welcome us. Not a woman was absent. The headache had disappeared by magic, the Abbey ruins remained unsketched, and Sibyl Carr's innumerable friends had to content themselves with very meagre epistles. How could I have supposed for a moment that the cheerers of our existence would stay away from us. So vain are the well-intentioned efforts of a mere man when matched against the deadly perseverance of woman. We lunched for an hour and a quarter, and had to miss about the best drive of the afternoon. Moreover, Jack Wingfield shot execrably, and completely forfeited the good opinion of Miss Watson who stood beside him and talked to him about modern art criticism, a subject of which he knows as much as his retriever does about bicycling. It will be admitted that I was not without my revenge.

That evening our party was joined by Jones Chifney. Who is there that does not know Jones Chifney, 'Little Chif,' as we call him in our more familiar moments? Chif is tremendous at

charades and private theatricals; he has a kind of foolish facility in turning out vapid little rhymes for ladies' albums, tiny grains of Praed or Calverley dissolved in a gallon of unsparkling water. His lines 'To a Dresden Shepherdess' still have a certain vogue, and his 'Elegy on a Scent-bottle' has been much admired, though neither of these masterpieces has submitted itself to the rough and desecrating hand of the printer.

I picked thee up, I see thee still;  
Thy mistress was with grief demented,  
While from thy wound a tiny rill  
Ran, which her kerchief should have scented.

Happy in life thou wert, thy breath  
My lady for fresh conquests arming,  
And happier in thine hour of death  
To be so mourned by one so charming.

These are the only two verses I can remember out of the dozen or so of which this gay little trifle was composed. I cite them as samples of Little Chif's poetic faculty at its best. Now, Chif was a terrible fellow amongst the ladies. He fetched and carried for them, he told them anecdotes of the glorious world in which he habitually

moved, he knew the family histories, the cousinships, the scandals, the heroic misadventures, the secret sorrows of all the greatest families. If you happened to mention Bunberry as one of your friends, he would immediately break in upon you with the information that poor Tom Bunberry did a bad day's work when he quarrelled with Sir John Plum-Bunberry, his great uncle, who had in consequence cut him out of his will, and left the whole of his enormous fortune to the young and improvident Lord Ratafie, his wife's second cousin three times removed. Stories would follow dealing with Lord Ratafie's scandalous conduct with Miss Alma Beauséant, the latest skirt-dancer, and the grief this had caused to his saintly mother, whose Evangelical principles have made her respected in all the most blameless missionary and Sunday School circles. Chif stands five feet four in his shooting boots, his brilliant stockings are doubly turned over a pair of hypothetical calves, and his ties and waistcoats are a dream. To see this little creature dangling after a dowager, like a tom-tit in attendance on an Aylesbury duck, is a liberal education in the art of winning the consideration of middle-aged feminine stoutness. When he shoots

he is never happy until the ladies appear. *Then* he is in his element, explaining to them the complexities of his gun, the tricks by which (in fancy) a rocketing pheasant may be brought to bag, and buzzing into their ears all the little frivolities which he keeps in constant readiness at the end of his indefatigable tongue. But on the day of which I speak poor little Chif was off-colour. His sallies were infrequent, gloom was throned upon his forehead. *He felt that I had my eye on him*, and was torn between his prospective delight at appearing in print, and the agonised desire to utter sayings worthy of his reputation. The ladies whom he invited one after another to walk with him, or to stand by his side while he waited for the driven birds, found him but a dull companion, and wondered what could have happened to dash the spirits of dear Mr. Chifney. I alone knew, and I congratulated myself modestly, but not without enthusiasm, upon having helped to silence even for a day this ridiculous little pretence at being a man. Great, indeed, are the influences of the pen, and mighty is the power of the press when even a Chifney has to submit to it. We passed a peaceful evening,

and there were neither charades nor *bouts rimés* to vex us. When I meet Chif now he eyes me suspiciously, and chokes back the anecdote about the Duchess of Dillwater which was trembling into utterance.

## CHAPTER XIII

## THE KEEPER

*(With an Excursus on Beaters)*

OF the many varieties of keeper, I propose, at present, to consider only the average sort of keeper, who looks after a shooting, comprising partridges, pheasants, hares, and rabbits, in an English county. Now it is to be observed that your ordinary keeper is not a conversational animal. He has, as a rule, too much to do to waste time in unnecessary talk. To begin with, he has to control his staff, the men and boys who walk in line with you through the root-fields, or beat the coverts for pheasants. That might seem at first sight to be an easy business, but it is actually one of the most difficult in the world. For thorough perverse stupidity, you will not easily match the autochthonous beater. Watch him as he trudges along, slow, expressionless, clod-resembling, lethargic, and say how you would like

to be the chief of such an army. He is always getting out of line, pressing forward unduly, or hanging back too much, and the loud voice of the keeper makes the woods resound with remonstrance, entreaty, and blame, hurled at his bovine head. After lunch, it is true, the beater wakes up for a little. Then shall you hear William exchanging confidences from one end of the line to the other with Jarge, while the startled pheasant rises too soon and goes back, to the despair of the keeper and the guns. Then, too, are heard the shouts of laughter which greet the appearance of a rabbit, and the air is thick with the sticks that the joyous, beery beaters fling at the scurrying form of their hereditary foe. It is marvellous to note with what a venomous hatred the beater regards the bunny. Pheasant or partridge he is careless of ; even the hare is, in comparison, a thing of nought, but let him once set eyes on a rabbit, and his whole being seems to change. His eye absolutely flashes, his chest heaves with excitement beneath the ancient piece of sacking that protects his form from thorns. If the rabbit falls to the shot, he yells with exultation ; if it be missed, an expression of morose and gloomy disappointment settles on his face, and you

can almost hear him saying to himself, 'Things are played out ; the world is worthless !'

All these characteristics are the keeper's despair ; though, to be sure, he has staunch lieutenants in his under-keepers ; and towards the end of the day he can always count on two sympathising allies in the postman and the policeman. These two never fail to come out in the afternoon to join the beaters. It is amusing to watch the demeanour of the beaters in the policeman's presence. Some of them, it is possible, have been immeshed by the law, and have made the constable's acquaintance in his professional capacity. Others are conscious of undiscovered peccadilloes, or they feel that on some future day they may be led to transgress rules, of which the policeman is the sturdy embodiment. None of them is, therefore, quite at his best in the policeman's presence. Their attitude may be described as one of uneasy familiarity, bursting here and there into jocular nervousness, but never quite attaining the rollicking point. You may sometimes take advantage of this feeling to let off a joke on a beater. Select a stout, plethoric one, and say to him, ' Mind you keep your eye on the policeman, or he'll poach a rabbit before

you can say knife.' This simple inversion of probabilities and positions is quite certain to 'go.' A hesitating smile will first creep into the corners of the beater's eye. After an interval spent in grappling with the jest, he will become purple, and finally he will explode.

During the rest of the day you will hear him repeating your little pleasantry either to himself or to his companions. You can keep it up by saying now and then, 'How many did the constable pocket that last beat?' (*Shouts of laughter.*) Thus shall your reputation as a humorist be established amongst the beating fraternity—('That 'ere Muster Jackson, 'e do make a chap laugh, that 'e do,' is the formula)—and if you revisit the same shooting next year, a beater is sure to take an opportunity of saying to you, with a grin on his face, 'Police-man's a comin' out to-day, sir; I'm a goin' to hev my eye tight on 'im, so as 'e don't pocket no rabbits,' to which you will reply, 'That's right, George, you stick to it, and you'll be a policeman yourself some day,' at which impossible anticipation there will be fresh explosions of mirth. So easily pleased is the rustic mind, so tenacious is the rustic memory.

But the head-keeper recks not of these things. All the anxiety of the day is his. If, for one reason or another, he fails to show as good a head of game as had been expected, he knows his master will be displeased. If the beaters prove intractable, the birds go wrong, but the burden of the host's disappointment falls on the keeper's shoulders. His are all the petty worries, the little failures of the day. The keeper is, therefore, not given to conversation. How should he be, with all these responsibilities weighing upon him ? Few of those who shoot realise what the keeper has gone through to provide the sport. Inclement nights spent in the open, untiring vigilance by day and by night, a constant and patient care of his birds during the worst seasons, short hours of sleep, and long hours of tramping, these make up the keeper's life. And, after all, what a fine fellow is a good keeper. In what other race of men can you find in a higher degree the best and manliest qualities, unswerving fidelity, dauntless courage, unflinching endurance of hardship and fatigue, and an upright honesty of conduct and demeanour ? I protest that if ever the sport of game-shooting is attacked, one powerful argument in its favour may be found in the fact that

it produces such men as these, and fosters their staunch virtues. Think well of all this, my young friend, and do not vex the harassed keeper with idle and frivolous remarks. But you may permit yourself to say to him, during the day, 'That's a nice dog of yours ; works capitally.'

'Yes, sir,' the keeper will say, 'he's not a bad 'un for a young 'un. Plenty of good blood in him. His mother's old *Dido*. I've had to leave her at home to-day, because she's got a sore foot ; but her nose is something wonderful.'

'Did you have much trouble breaking him ?'

'Lor' bless you, sir, no. He took to it like a duck to the water. Nothing comes amiss to him. You stand there, sir, and you'll get some nice birds over you. They mostly breaks this way.'

That kind of conversation establishes good relations, always an important thing. Or you may hint to him that he knows his business better than the host, as thus :—

'I must have been in the wrong place that last beat. Not a single bird came near me.'

'Of course you were, sir. I knew how it would be. I wanted you fifty yards higher up, but Mr. Chalmers, he would have you here. Lor, I've

never known birds break here. Now then, you boys, stop that chattering, or I sends you all home. Seem to think they're out here to enjoy theirselves, instead of doing as I tells 'em. Come, rattle your sticks ! '

Thus are the little beaters and the stops admonished.

## CHAPTER XIV

THE KEEPER—(*continued*)

Is there no way, then, you may ask, in which the head-keeper may be lured from his customary silence for more than a sentence or two? Yes, there is one absolutely certain method, and, so far as I know, only one. The subject to which you must lead your conversation is—no, it isn't poachers, for a good keeper takes the occasional poacher as part of his programme. He wages war against him, of course; and, if his shooting happens to be situated near a town of some importance, the war is often a very sanguinary one, only ended by the extermination (according to Assize-Court methods) of the poachers. But the keeper, as I say, takes all this as a matter of course. He recognises that poachers, after all, are men; as a sportsman, he must have a sneaking sympathy for one whose science and wood-craft often baffle his own; and, therefore, though he fights against him

sturdily and conscientiously, and, as a rule, triumphs over him, he does not generally, being what I have described him, brag of these victories, nor, indeed, does he care to talk about them. ‘There, but for the grace of God, goes Velveteens,’ must be the mental exclamation of many a good keeper when he hears his enemy sentenced to a period of compulsory confinement. I do not wish to be misunderstood. There are poachers and poachers. And whereas we may have a certain sympathy for the instinct of sport that seems to compel some men to match their skill against the craft of fur or feather reared at the expense and by the labour of others, there can surely be none for the methodical rogues who band themselves together on business principles, and plunder coverts just as others crack cribs, or pick pockets. Even sentiment is wasted on these gentlemen.

But I return from this digression. The one subject, then, on which a keeper may be trusted to become eloquent is that of

#### FOXES

Just try him. Suppose you are shooting a wood, in which you expect to find a considerable

number of pheasants. The guns are posted, the beaters have begun to move at the far end of the wood. Suddenly you are aware of a commotion in the middle of the wood. Here and there pheasants rise long before the beaters have approached. There is a whirring of wings, and dozens of birds sail away, unshot at, to right, to left, and all over the place. And then, while you are still wondering what this may mean, a fine dog-fox comes sliding out from the covert. Away he goes at top speed across the open. The little stops view him as he passes, and far and near the air resounds with shrill 'yoick!' and 'tally-ho!' In the end four birds are brought to bag, where twenty at least had been expected. When the beat is over, this is the kind of conversation you will probably hear :—

*First Beater (to a colleague).*—I seed un, Jim ; a great, fine fox 'e were, a slinkin' off jest afore we coom up. 'Go it,' I says to myself ; 'go it, Muster Billy Fox, you bin spoilin' sport, I'll warrant, time you was off' ; and out 'e popped as sly as fifty on 'em, ah, that 'e was.

*Second B.*—Ah ! I lay 'e was that. Where did 'e slip to, Tom ?

*First B.*—I heerd 'em a hollerin' away by

Chuff's Farm. Reckon 'e's goin' to hev 'is supper there to-night.

*Second B.*—And a pretty meal 'e 'll make of it. Pheasant for breakfast, pheasant for dinner, pheasant for tea; I'll lay 'e don't get much thinner.

*One of the Guns (to the Keeper).*—Nuisance about that fox, Sykes.

*Keeper.*—Nuisance, sir? You may say that. Why, I've seen as many as four o' them blamed varmints one after another in this 'ere blessed wood. Did you see 'im, sir? I wish you'd a shot 'im just by mistake. Nobody wouldn't a missed 'im. But there, a-course I daren't touch 'em. Mr. Chalmers wouldn't like it, and a-course I couldn't bring myself to do it. But I do say, we've got too many on 'em, and we never get the hounds, or if they do come, they don't kill. What am I to do? Mr. Chalmers wants birds, and 'e wants foxes too. I tell 'im 'e can't have both. I does my best, but what's a man to do with a couple o' thousand foxes nippin' the heads off of his birds? Fairly breaks my heart, sir. Keep 'em alive, indeed! Live and let live's my motter, but it ain't the plan o' them blamed foxes.

[*And so forth ad lib.*

There are other animals which your true keeper holds in aversion. And chief amongst these is the domestic cat. You might as well try to keep a journalist from his writing-paper as country cats from the coverts. They are inveterate and determined poachers, and, alas, they meet with scant mercy from the keeper if he catches them. Many a fireside tabby or tortoise-shell dies a violent death in the course of every year, and is buried in a secret grave. This often gives rise to disturbance, for the cottager, to whom the deceased was as the apple of her eye, may make complaint of the keeper to his master. My friend Sykes, one of the best keepers I know, once related to me an incident of this nature. As it may help to explain the nature of keepers, and throw light on the conversational method to be adopted with them, I here set down the winged words in which Sykes addressed me.

‘Trouble, sir? I believe you. Them old women gives me a peck o’ trouble, far more nor the breakin’ of a retriever dog. There’s old Mrs. Padstow, Mother Padds we call ’er, she’s a rare old teaser. Went up to Mr. Chalmers last week and told ’im I’d shot ’er pet cat. Mr. Chalmers ’e

spoke to me about it : said I'd better go and make it right with the old gal. So, yesterday I goes to call upon 'er. First we passed the time o' day together, and then we got to business. You see, sir, me and the old lady had always been friendly, so I took it on the friendly line. "Look 'ere," I says, "Mrs. Padstow, I've come about a cat." "Ah," she says. "It's just this way," I says, "Mr. Chalmers tells me you said I'd shot your cat. Now," I says, straightenin' myself up and lookin' proud, "I couldn't scarcely believe that, and you and me such good friends, so I've just come to ask you if you did say that." She was a bit took aback at this, so I asked 'er again. "Well," she says, "I didn't exactly say that." "What did you say then?" I asked her. "I told Mr. Chalmers," she says, "that our old cat 'ad been shot what never did no 'arm, and I thought it might be as you'd a done it, p'raps not meanin' it." "Ah," I says, "them was your words, was they?" "Yes," she says, "them was my words." "Well, then," I says, "you'd better be careful what you say next time, or you don't know whose character you'll be takin' away next." And with that I left 'er.'

‘ But did you shoot the cat, Sykes ? ’ I ventured to ask.

‘ *Did I shoot it ? Ho, ho, ha, ha ! What do you think, sir ?* ’

And with that enigmatic answer the dialogue closed.

## CHAPTER XV

## THE KEEPER. (HIS TIPS)

THIS subject is not only of immense importance —especially to the possessors of small incomes, but it has all the charm that comes from mystery. Observe towards the end of the last day's shooting how the keeper hangs about, still finding something to attend to, someone to admonish, when on other days he has sped cheerfully away to the house. Observe too how the guns collect in little knots, and ask mysterious questions of one another and fumble in waistcoat pockets, while the host assumes an air of unconcern, and strolls apart from his friends. What can it all mean? It means simply this, that the tipping time has arrived.

There is not much conversation to be made of it. The thing is done too quickly and with too complete a pretence that nothing of the kind is

being done. For though the host knows that his keeper is standing under a golden shower, and though the guns know that they have got to part, and though the keeper himself knows that the golden discs are about to be pressed into his horny palm, they all affect a perfect ignorance. The host contemplates a beautiful sunset effect, the guns pretend that they must hang behind to give special instructions about their cartridges, and the keeper finds suddenly that matters of the utmost urgency retain him in the immediate neighbourhood of the guns. There is but little variety about such dialogue as may take place.

If two young shooters talk it over together, each tries to find out what the other proposes to give before committing himself, *e.g.* :

*First Young Shooter (quietly and tentatively).*—Um, ah, what shall you give to Sykes ?

*Second Young Shooter (dubiously).*—Oh, I don't know: usual thing, I suppose. What shall you give him ?

*First Y. S.*—Well, it's been a pretty fair day—nothing extraordinary, but we've seen birds nearly all the time. I should think a soy would be too much.

*Second Y. S. (relieved).*—Dear me, yes; I shouldn't think of giving a sovereign (*quietly pockets the sovereign which was ready in his hand, and substitutes a half-sovereign*).—I always think ten bob ample for a day like this.

*First Y. S.*—So do I. That's what I shall give him.

But the old, case-hardened, weather-beaten shooter never has any doubt about the matter. He has his scale of tips regulated according to the quality of the sport and the amount of the bag; and though he may not give as much as some other guns, the keeper knows him of old, appreciates his good shooting, and likes him doubtless as well as the more munificent tipsters. For in most cases your keeper is a sportsman, and judges men who shoot by their sporting qualities rather than by their wealth. Of the keeper, then, enough has now been said.

## CHAPTER XVI

## A MUSICAL HOST

‘DEAR —,’ writes a valued correspondent, ‘I wish you’d tip me the wink how I’m to talk to my hosts. I’m a poor man, but not a poor shot. So I get asked about a good deal to different places, and as I’m not the sort that turns on the talking-tap very easily, I often get stuck up. Just as I’ve got fairly into the swim with one of them I leave him, and have to think of talk for quite a different kind of chap, and so on all through the season. For instance, last December I did three shoots in as many weeks. The first was with old Callaby, the rich manufacturer, who’s turned sportsman late in life. I thought he’d like a talk about bimetallism, so I sweated it up a bit, and started off with a burst as soon as I got a look in. All no go. Nothing would please him but to talk of birds, and rabbits, and hares, and farming, and crops,

and who was going to be high sheriff, and all that. So I got a little left at the first go off.

‘ Next week I shot with Blossom, another new friend, who’s come into money lately, after knocking about all over America the greater part of his life. I tried him with the Chicago Exposition, and ranching as a business for younger sons. Did it delicately, of course, and with any amount of deference, but he only looked at me blankly, and began talking about the bank-rate. After that, I settled with myself I wouldn’t talk to any more of them about things that they might be expected to feel an interest in.

‘ In the following week I was due at Whichello’s. He’s been a perfect lunatic all his life for music. He got up an orchestra in his nursery, which came to smash because his younger brother filled all the wind instruments with soap-suds. Later on he was always scraping, or blowing, or thumping, scooting about from one concert to another, making expeditions to the shrine of Wagner as he called it, composing songs, and symphonies, and operas, and heaven only knows what besides. He came into the old place in Essex when his brother died, about a year ago, and this was his first pheasant-shoot.

I thought to myself, "If you're anything like these other Johnnies, it's no good pulling out the music-stop with you." On the first morning he seemed a shade anxious at breakfast, and said he was going to try a new plan of beating his coverts, which it had given him a lot of trouble to arrange as he wanted. Off we went after breakfast. We had about half a mile to walk before we got to the first wood, and I kept puzzling my brains the whole way about this blessed new dodge of beating.

"Where are the beaters?" I said to Whichello when we got there, for devil a bit of one did I see.

"You'll find them out directly," says Whichello, looking sly and triumphant; "just you stand here and wait. You'll get some shooting, I warrant you;" and, with that, he posted the other guns at the far end of the covert, told me and another chap we were to walk outside, in line with the beaters, and walked off. Suddenly he gave a whistle. Then what do you think happened? I'll give you a hundred guesses, and you won't be on it. Out of a little planting, about fifty yards off the piece we were to shoot, came marching a troop of rustics, dressed as rustic beaters usually are, but

each of them carrying, in place of the ordinary beater's stick, a musical instrument of some sort. They were headed by the keeper, who waved a kind of *bâton*. When they got to our covert, they arranged themselves in line, and then, on a signal from Whichello, crash, bang ! they struck up the "Tannhäuser March," and disappeared into the wood.

" "Line up, Trombone ! " shouted the keeper—I heard his stentorian roar above the din—" Come, hurry along with the Bombardon ; Ophicleide, you're too far in front. Keep it going, Clarinets. Now then, all together ! What are you up to, Cymbals ? Let 'em have it ! " And thus they came banging and booming and blowing through the covert. The bassoon tripped into a thornbush, the big-drum rolled over the trunk of a tree and smashed his instrument, the hautboy threw his at an escaping rabbit, while the flute-man walked straight into a pool of water, and had to be pulled out by the triangle. But the rest of them got through somehow, with that infernal idiot of a conducting keeper still backing and twisting and waving like mad in the front. That was Whichello's idea of beating his coverts. " Com-

bining æsthetic pleasure with sporting pursuits," he called it. Somehow we had managed to bring down a brace of pheasants, which, with three rabbits, made up our total, out of a covert which ought to have yielded ten times as many.

' I daresay you won't believe this story, but it's true all the same. If you don't believe it, write to Whichello himself. I never saw anyone half so pleased as he was. He had given up all his time to teaching his rustics music, with a view to this performance, and had shoved in, as one of his keepers, a sporting third violin from the Drury Lane orchestra. They said it was glorious, and congratulated one another all round with as much enthusiasm as if they'd repelled a foreign invasion. On the next beat they played the "March in Scipio," and after that came a "Pot-Pourri of Popular Melodies," arranged by the keeper. They played a selection from "The Pirates of Penzance" while we lunched, and took the big wood to the tunes of "Ta-ra-ra-boom-de-ay" and "Uprouse ye then, my merry, merry Men!" "Rule Britannia" and "Home, Sweet Home," played us back to the house. I never heard such a confounded babel of brass and wood in all my life. A German band in

a country town couldn't come near it. Curiously enough, we most of us got urgent letters by next morning's post, summoning us home at once to attend to business, or to be present at the death-beds of relatives. I thought you'd like to hear this story, old cock. If you like, you're very welcome to shove it in your shooting series. I've seen a lot of rum goes in my life, but this was the rummest of the lot. And don't forget to let me have a word or two about talking to one's host. I know what I thought of that maniac Whichello, but I shouldn't have liked to say that to him.

‘Yours to a turn,

‘A SPORTSMAN.’

For the present I must leave this striking letter to the judgment of my readers. Space fails me to deal with it adequately. On some other occasion I may be able to set down my ideas on the difficult subject suggested by my polite Correspondent.

## CHAPTER XVII

## HOSTS GENERALLY

LETTERS continue to pour in upon me. Here is one from the gallant Shabrack :—

‘ Dear old Cock,—I see you’re still at the old game, spoiling paper by the yard, and making us all believe you know what’s what when you’ve got a bundook in your hands. Look here, my gay quill-driver ; why don’t you give us the tip what we’re to talk about on a wet day ? I’ll take precious short odds about your knowing how any lot of men are to keep their tongues wagging when the rain’s soaking in at their knees, and running down behind their collars, and when their boots go squelch at every step. ’Tother day we started out grouse-driving—brilliant sunshine and all that kind of thing, and three miles to the first butts. Before we got there the sky was as black as old Melbury’s face when his wife gives him snuff before visitors, and five minutes afterwards down came the rain,

just as if they'd bored holes in a river-bed up there with the notion of letting all the water run out. First we thought it meant clearing up, so we sat tight for a bit until it got thinner. Then we started again for the next butts, and down it came again, twice as hard. We stuck to it for three hours, and then we chucked it and came home, feeling as if we were wet enough to run down a sink and never be missed. Now what do you think we ought to have talked about? I don't know anybody who made much more than two remarks. The first was, "It can't last long at this rate; bound to clear up directly": the second was, "This isn't good enough; I vote we make tracks." The keeper said he had known it rain like this for a week on end, and Melbury said it was a cursed country and not fit for anybody to live in who wasn't a trout or an eel. Then someone else said a short word, and then we all dripped home. I don't think even you could have done much better, could you?

'Yours to a turn,

'JOHN CHURCHILL SHABRACK.'

I confess Shabrack is right. I know only one other kind of day that approaches the wet day as a

spoiler of conversation, and that is the utterly blank day. And the worst of the blank day is that it is generally incomprehensible. When that beat was shot last year it yielded a good number of head of game. To-day the weather is as fine, the keeper as busy, the beaters as numerous and well disciplined, the dogs as active, the host as keen, and the guns as pleasantly expectant: yet from covert to covert scarce a whirr of wings or a patter of feet disturbs the stillness of the autumn atmosphere. You can't condole with your host for ever. He feels the bitterness of it more keenly than you, and is apt to resent even a hint of condolence. Better say nothing, take your place as appointed, and hope for good luck sooner or later. At the end of the day you can always tell your host, when he is making the air blue with his disappointment, that you've 'had a grand day in the open air,' that it has been 'a very nice little sporting day,' and that for your own part you 'don't care about these tremendous days at easy birds. Give me a shot now and then at a difficult bird and I'm content.' However, I need not advise you about this. You've probably said it over and over again on different occasions.

I began this chapter with the intention of dis-

cussing the conversational value of hosts, but behold whither I have been carried. The fact is that conversationally there is not much difference in hosts. Some give you better shooting, and are themselves better shots than others, and with these of course your talk will be gayer and more sparkling. One delightful country house, however, stands out in my memory. There the host, though he was a good shot, did not care to be troubled about all the *minutiae* which the management of a shooting entails. He was of an artistic temperament, and often lost himself and the rest of the party in his admiration of the glorious tints of an autumn landscape or the marvellous effect of a distant haze. The shooting was managed by his eldest son, who also controlled and directed the posting of the guns. This was the kind of thing that took place.

*Host (to eldest Son).*—Now then, Arthur, where do you want me this time?

*Eldest Son.*—You'd better go forward this time, father, on the right. I'll walk with the beaters. We'll give you plenty of time to get to your place.

*Host.*—That'll suit me very well. (*Walks on with the other guns who have been sent forward. After an interval the beaters start.*)

*Keeper*.—Now then, keep up in line, you beaters. Keep up, I tell 'ee. Bill Stokes, where be you a goin'? Hold hard, men; forward all together. Cuss me if all them birds ain't a gettin' away on the right and never a shot fired at 'em. Surelie his lordship's never gone and got Mr. Arthur to put him there. Hold hard, all on ye; hold hard.

*Eldest Son (outside covert)*.—Father! (*silence*). Father!! (*silence*). Father!!!

*Keeper*.—All them birds is gettin' away, Mr. Arthur, and we shan't see 'em agin.

*Eldest Son*.—I told his lordship to go there, but (*in despair*) I don't know where he's got to. (*Catches sight of a distant figure leaning against a stile, sketch-book in hand*.) Oh, there he is, miles away. I don't know what to do with him. (*Signals violently, and at length attracts his father's attention, and causes him to saunter to his post*.) Now then, come on; don't let's lose any more time.

(*At the conclusion of the beat*)

*Host*.—My dear boy, you shouldn't hurry through these coverts at such a fearful pace; you're bound to lose a great number of birds. Take my advice; do it more slowly next time.

## CHAPTER XVIII

## FIRST OF FEBRUARY REFLECTIONS

AND now farewell for a space, my gallant hammerless ejector ! Farewell, oh cartridge bag, seasoned by wind and rain ! Farewell gaiters, shooting boots, knickerbocker breeches ! The end of the season has come, and I shall require you no more for the present. What a season it has been ! Grouse plentiful, partridge abundant, pheasants as strong and tall as the heart of a moderate shooter can desire, or his uncertain aim attain to ; swarms of hares in defiance of mournful prophecies of extinction given forth year by year by those who see in the Ground Game Act the death of sport, and look upon Sir William Harcourt, who brought it in, as an iconoclast worse than any follower of John Knox ; here and there a glinting woodcock to give a spice of danger to the day and fill up the gaps in our shooting conversation ; rabbits of almost Australian

plentifulness—this is the record on which I look back as the evening's shadows close in on the first of February.

Did I shoot well? Hum, well—ask me another. Did I shoot badly? No-o-o, I don't think I did; no, I'm certain I didn't. Still, there was one awful day, when the pheasants seemed to come merely to 'cock (or hen) a snook' at me, and then sail away unharmed into the distance in spite of my two despairing shots. But of course I knew I shouldn't shoot well that day. I had slept on a feather-bed, which is fatal to accurate shooting, and had eaten devilled chicken for breakfast, which is equally fatal. Besides, I'm quite certain there was something wrong with my cartridges, and there was a yelping retriever who got on my nerves. Curious he didn't get on Dick's nerves, and Dick is as a rule more irritable than I am. Perfect nonsense, Dick trying to make me believe he had filled his cartridge-bag by mistake with my cartridges. He couldn't have done that, because he shot extraordinarily well. Yet Dick was never a gratuitous liar. Anyhow, *I* couldn't hit anything that day. The miserable recollections, however, were almost wiped out two days afterwards. I really flatter

myself I held as straight as the straightest that day, and was quite modest about it. Dick, who is one of the glories of the Gun Club, didn't come off. He was much annoyed because I wiped his eye three times running at what he called 'impossible birds.' He said it all came from sleeping on a feather-bed, but I had slept on a feather-bed too, so it couldn't have been that. But why, oh, why, are rabbits so hard to shoot? They are small, of course, but so is a partridge; and they go very fast, but so does everything else except a land-rail, and I've seen a slow old land-rail flap the gauntlet of three A1 shots without losing so much as a tail-feather. 'By gad,' they explained, 'that was a rum 'un, but you can't expect to hit a thing that goes a yard an hour when you've been shooting at flashes of lightning all day.'

Of all created things rabbits in covert are the most perverse and elusive. They don't want to be shot. Perhaps that's natural; but then they're no sportsmen, for they don't give you the ghost of a chance of making ghosts of them. Yet Loder, my friend Loder, doesn't seem to feel this. He sees a flash of white fur in the thicket, and, while I'm wondering whether I ought to fire, bang!

the rabbit's dead, and Loder's score is increased by one. The beggar doesn't even trouble to put his gun to his shoulder always. It's not right.

Another day I remember, a day when all the birds, moved by the diabolical impulse that sometimes afflicts them, would insist on going wrong. If we stood forward, with all proper regard for wind and every other circumstance, streams of feathered demons kept whirring back where Johnson, the sporting solicitor, missed them with a genial regularity that nothing could disturb. If we left our best guns back, as we did eventually in desperation, Johnson, who was placed forward, again stood under a canopy of pheasants, and shot, with brilliant success, into the gaps. The host was furious, the keeper was in sombre despair, the good shots were depressed, only Johnson was jubilant. On such occasions the only theory which is accepted as explaining the catastrophe is one that imputes a malignant cunning to the birds. This is the kind of conversation you will hear.

*Host (at the end of the beat).*—Done again, by the living Jingo! Did you ever see such infernal birds? I've shot this wood on the same plan for

five years, and I've never known the birds to go that way. It's perfectly sickening.

*The Keeper*.—Ah, they've fairly beat us this time, sir. Pity you didn't leave the two Captains back, as I asked you. They'd 'ave 'ad first-rate shootin'.

*A Gun*.—Oh, it's no good calculating on these pheasants doing anything for certain. Do you think they don't know what we *want* them to do? Of course they do, and they jolly well make up their minds to beat us. They're just as cunning as they make 'em. Nothing beats an old cock-pheasant for cunning. Why, when I was shooting with Jack Bailey the other day, we only got twenty-five out of his best wood, where we ought to have got about 150 (*and so on, with the usual reminiscence of a sporting disappointment*).

*Host*.—You're quite right. Pheasants are the knowin'est brutes that ever flew.

You have only got to substitute grouse or partridge for pheasants, and you have in the above dialogue a formula that will fit every case.

There was another day in another year—can I ever forget it?—when misfortunes came to me in battalions. Not only was I off my form, but

at the crowning moment of a big beat, I found myself pulling at a half-cocked gun. Have you ever experienced that misery? It leads not so much to conversation as to a comminatory monologue. I have commemorated it in verse.

#### HALF-COCK

It was a dull December day—

Days mostly are in mid-December ;—

From tree to tree a shrieking jay

Made discord, as I well remember.

‘Line up, you boys,’ I heard him plain,

The keeper cried, ‘Left hand, move faster.’

Slight sounds, but burnt into my brain

By that dull day’s supreme disaster.

Oh, sweet to one whose gun is cocked

The pheasant’s rustle mid the trees is.

It was a covert thickly stocked

With pheasants as with mites a cheese is.

The line drew onward in its beat,

And, though the sticks kept up a clatter,

I seemed to hear a thousand feet

Of pheasants on the dry leaves patter.

I scarce had shot a single bird.

I know not why—these things are puzzles—  
Pheasant and rabbit both preferred  
To die that day by other muzzles.  
Or if some reckless bird aspired  
To suit me, it was very odd he  
Seemed, as without effect I fired,  
All tail, and not a scrap of body.

Some twenty rabbits, too, had crossed  
The grassy rides where I was posted.  
My score was eighteen rabbits lost,  
And only two completely 'ghosted.'  
By shooting soon, or shooting late,  
I missed them ; yet it does seem funny  
That fancy thus should elongate  
The short but most deceptive bunny.

Though it were wiser not to care  
For trifles such as these, they vexed me ;  
My skill—I would not boast—is fair,  
And this day's want of it perplexed me.  
So, as I stood and watched the trees,  
I vowed this time to aim much harder,  
And kill my birds in style, and please  
My host, and help to fill his larder.

At last, at last ! a whirr of wings !  
Here comes a bunch of six or seven.  
To right, to left, they stream in strings,  
Some low, some soaring high as heaven.  
I raised my gun ; with might and main,  
While straight above the pheasants rocket,  
I pulled and pulled, but all in vain,—  
For I had quite forgot to cock it.

Away they flew : can pardon be  
For bursts of language double-shotted ?  
When *Uncle Toby's* speech flew free,  
The word was by an angel blotted.  
Yet if, while I addressed my gun,  
That angel marked me as I muttered,  
He must have dropped more tears than one  
To blot the hasty words I uttered.

And still, though years have passed away,  
And memories fade as men grow older,  
My dreams repeat that fatal day ;  
The half-cocked gun is at my shoulder,  
I strive to cry, my voice is dumb,  
While, by my nightmare fears made bigger,  
Flocks of gigantic pheasants come,  
And bid me tug the useless trigger.

And so farewell till next season ye guns, cartridges, shooting-lunches, muffed birds, lost birds, winged birds, eager dogs, liable to your masters' anger; ye beaters hot in pursuit of the much enduring rabbit; ye keepers, men of sterling quality both in skill and in the tips ye receive. And farewell, all ye pleasant companions of many happy days; good shots, passable shots, and poor shots, farewell, a brief farewell to all of you. Next season, I hope, we shall all shoot again, and converse, if aught my humble efforts have availed, even more brilliantly and aptly than before. Heaven prosper all shooters in the interval !

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